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SUBJECT: ARMENIA'S TENTATIVE STEPS TOWARDS NATO

REF: YEREVAN 287

Classified By: DCM A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

#### SUMMARY

1. (C) Armenia is making steady progress in preparing its NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) and plans to have a document ready for presentation to the Alliance on April 7. Armenia's plans for its developing relationship with NATO do not include membership, but it is exploring ways to take advantage of reform tools provided by the Alliance and also to prepare capabilities which could be of use in joint operations. A February 24 visit to Yerevan by Bob Simmons, the NATO Secretary General's Special Rep for the South Caucasus, helped focus Armenia's efforts in preparing its IPAP. Simmons praised new inter-agency drafting efforts, encouraged drafters to collaborate informally with NATO before presentation and, in public statements, reassured skeptics that NATO is not in competition with Russia for influence in Armenia. Simmons rejected press speculation about a role for NATO in peacekeeping operations in Nagorno-Karabakh and encouraged Armenia to continue work within the OSCE Minsk Group. End Summary.

#### Armenia Seeks NATO Engagement, Not Membership

2. (C) While Armenia does not plan to seek a membership track with NATO, its cooperation with the Alliance is increasing. NATO Assistant Secretary General Bob Simmons told us that he was impressed with the work of the inter-ministerial group working on Armenia's IPAP. He said that the while the MFA and MOD understood how to work with NATO, other ministries did not and this hampered drafting somewhat. Simmons said that Armenia hopes to have a presentation document ready to present in Brussels on April 7. He encouraged GOAM officials to use a March visit of PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) experts to focus IPAP drafting efforts. Deputy DefMin Aghabekian told us that Armenia plans to take full advantage of A/SYG Simmons' invitation to consult informally with NATO experts before the GOAM makes its presentation.

3. (C) Hrachia Taschian, the MFA's NATO desk officer told us that Armenia looks to use the IPAP process to push forward on defense reform issues. Reading from the MOD's current draft submission to the IPAP, Taschian said the MOD was willing to discuss structural reform, interoperability, continuing PfP NATO exercises, defense training and education, liaison arrangements, modernization of communication equipment, defense economics and budget, and other issues as well.

4. (C) While Armenia is pursuing closer collaboration with NATO, it would not do so at the expense of its relations with Russia. In a recent visit by Russian FM Lavrov, both the Armenian FM and President Kocharian assured him that Armenia would not reconsider the presence of Russian bases in Armenia (ref), and MFA contacts sometimes describe Armenia's doctrine of "complementarity" as more realist than the policies of its Westward-leaning neighbors. In comments to the press, A/SYG Simmons said that NATO is not in competition with Russia for Armenia. Simmons told us that this was a key concern of President Kocharian as well; Simmons briefed Armenia's president on the state of the NATO-Russia relationship. He said Kocharian was relieved the relationship is positive.

#### COMMENT

6. (C) We have pressed Armenia's defense institutions hard to become more transparent. This steady engagement on all fronts, including by EUCOM, by NATO and through increased assistance programs is starting to bear fruit. Armenia's top defense planners are now talking to us about post-conflict restructuring and downsizing. They are also consulting with us on what capabilities would be best for Armenia to develop for peacekeeping operations. We will continue to seek opportunities to press the GOAM to continue in this direction, even if forward progress remains slow.

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